



Annual Assessment Report Template

Academic Year: 2014-2015

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Date of Report Submission: 7/6/15

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I. Abstract

The purpose of this study was to add to our understanding how effective a cohort academic/programmatic intervention program, the Marillac Fellows, was in retaining students from the OMSS target population who also commute to campus and fall into the lowest ACRK for admission to the University. The methodology consisted of one focus group, individual interviews, and a survey. Findings indicated that cohort members from the 2013 – 2014 academic year experienced outcomes connected to belongingness and success, along with a rich understanding of resources. However, due to scheduling concerns and lack of programmatic participation incentives, the program did not run the duration of the academic year; thus resulting in very different outcomes for the 2014 – 2015 cohort year. Research findings will primarily focus on a comparison of the 2013 – 2014 & 2014 - 2015 academic year cohorts. Implications of research findings include recommendations for continuing targeted interventions for this population.

II. Learning Outcome Assessed

Learning Outcome 1: Knowledge Acquisition, Application, & Integration

Students who participate in Student Affairs programs and activities will be able to integrate and apply knowledge gained across curricular and co-curricular experiences in order to advance academic, personal, and career growth.

III. Introduction & Context

Goal 1 of DePaul University's Vision 2018 is to "enhance academic quality and support educational innovation", with its first outcome being to, "Expand and strengthen programs that focus on critical student transitions, including the first year for freshmen and transfer students, beginning or reentering college for adult students and entrance to major". The Office of Multicultural Student Success is an office that is absolutely centered on the successful transition, collegiate journey, and post-college trajectory for students of color, students who have exhibited financial need, and first generation college students.

Thus, through the mission of our office, we find alignment under Goal 1 of Vision 2018. One of our areas is responsible for the creation, innovation, and sustainment of College Transition programs for students within our target population who are arriving at DePaul University for their first or transfer year. As time went on, we realized that there

were intersections in the demographics of our target population and that there was another group that we knew needed to be served in their college transition: first year students in our target population who were commuters and fell into the lowest ACRK for admission to the University.

In OMSS, we are always assessing risk factors with the help of our partners in IRMA, so that we can create effective student success programs for the students that would benefit the most. Thus, the Marillac Fellows program seemed to be a great addition to the OMSS office initiatives, in alignment with Goal 1 of Vision 2018.

Early theoretical research on student persistence began with Vincent Tinto's study on the issues of dropout among college students in universities. Tinto used Durkheim's theory of suicide and cost-benefit analysis to develop reasons for dropout among college students. Tinto creates "a conceptual Schema for Dropout from College" addressing key factors related to student dropout on college campuses (Tinto 1988, 95).

During the late 90s, Tinto conducted a qualitative and quantitative study at Seattle Central Community College. In his research, he concluded that "it was evident that participation in a collaborative or shared learning group enables students to develop a network of support [...] that helps bond students to the boarder social communities of college while also engaging them more fully in the academic life of the institution" (Tinto, 1988, 613). According to Tinto, "when students are involved with the idea of learning, academically [and] socially, the more they become involved with their personal learning experiences" (Tinto, 1997). As a result, Tinto declared that the breakdown of the academic and social barriers will lead to increased student persistence.

Tinto's early research provides a framework that focuses on social integration and creating safe spaces where students connect their life experiences to university culture (academic and social experience of a university). It is critical for first-generation, low-income and students of color to connect their life experiences with what they learn from staff, faculty and peers so that these students will be more likely to persist through college. Thus, the Marillac Fellows program seeks to serve these students who benefit most from the cohort / collaborative learning group and environment, in classes that will assist them with their curricular outcomes, and in facilitating activities that will assist them with personal growth during their college transition.

Through this project, we hypothesized that participation in the Marillac Fellows Program would lead to higher overall academic achievement and solid college transition as compared to students of similar populations, academic ranking, and residential status who choose not participate in the Marillac Fellows Program. In addition, completing an assessment project on this particular initiative would allow us to show the programmatic outcomes in the Marillac Fellows program that are consistently being addressed, show us areas that we need to strengthen, and allow us to compare / contrast the experiences of our target student population and in our particular cohort years.

This year, due to scheduling concerns and lack of programmatic participation incentives, the program did not run the duration of the academic year. Thus, students from the 2013 – 2014 Marillac Fellows group benefitted from a very different, tighter knit cohort model than the 2014 – 2015 cohort. This resulted in a lack of participation and in eventual discontinuation of the program as prescribed by our academic partners. Thus, the implications of the research findings from this assessment project will help us

compare both cohorts, look at what worked, and sheds some light on the primary ways that we can support students within this demographic.

IV. Data Collection & Methodology

How did you collect evidence to determine whether or not the learning outcomes are being achieved?

- Student learning was measured using focus groups for current and former participants in the Marillac Fellows program, surveys for the current Marillac cohort, and academic achievement data, including credit hours attempted and earned along with GPA achieved. When current cohort members did not attend scheduled focus groups, we invited them to 30-minute individual interviews.
- We hoped to assess 19 undergraduate, first year students from the Chicagoland area who have an Academic Ranking of 1 or 2 and commute to the DePaul campuses and commuter students with an Academic Ranking of 3 who are 1st generation students. We were able to collect academic achievement data on all students. Two students completed the available online survey and two students scheduled individual interviews. Five participants in the 2013-14 cohort of Marillac Fellows participated in a focus group to discuss how the program shaped their understanding of their success at DePaul as they prepared to complete their second year at DePaul University.

How was the evidence you collected analyzed? Please explain:

- Data was analyzed by Jade Perry, OMSS Coordinator.
- Primary data (focus group) and secondary data (interviews / surveys) were coded for themes that aligned with the chosen learning outcome: Knowledge Acquisition, Application, & Integration. We assessed the ability “to apply & integrate knowledge gained in co-curricular experiences” that would advance their academic growth during their college transition process and their personal growth / peer to peer connection. In addition, we ran success metrics for all 19 students involved in this academic cohort of the Marillac Fellows program, in order to see if success metrics were being met.

How was consent obtained? Please include:

- Survey invitation was sent out to the academic cohort of 2014-2015 which included clear language which let students know that participation was optional.
- The Marillac Fellows Focus Group for the cohort of 2013 – 2014 was conducted on Thursday, April 16th, 2015 and group facilitators explained:
 - The nature of the assessment project
 - Optional participation for each question and for the focus group, overall
- All identifying information about individual participants were stripped (and this was explained to the members of the focus group in advance), thus students felt more free to offer honest feedback.

V. Data & Results

What are the results of this assessment project?

- Phase 1 of Data Collection (Qualtrics Survey):
 - Invited participants: 18 fall, 11 Winter
 - Actual participants: 2 Fall, 5 Winter
- Phase 2 of Data Collection (Individual Interviews):
 - Invited participants: 11
 - Actual participants: 2
- Phase 3 of Data Collection (Focus Group, 2013 – 2014 Cohort for Comparison)
 - Invited participants: 11
 - Actual participants: 5
- Relevant participant demographic information (gender, race/ethnicity, year in school, etc.)
 - Phase 1: All 18 participants were invited. 12 identified as female, 6 identified as male. 10 participants identified as Latino/a, 7 as African-American, and 1 as White. All are in their first year at DePaul University.
 - Phase 2: All 18 participants were invited. 12 identified as female, 6 identified as male. 10 participants identified as Latino/a, 7 as African-American, and 1 as White. All are in their first year at DePaul University.
 - Phase 3: All students were in their sophomore year at DePaul University. 4 identified as women, 1 identified as male.

Results:

Marillac Fellows had the opportunity to engage in academic courses as a cohort (as available), in addition to extracurricular outings which would add to their personal growth. Due to logistics, scheduling, and participation conflicts outside of the locus of control for the Office of Multicultural Student Success, we found that the 2013 – 2014 cohort & the 2014 – 2015 cohorts had two vastly different experiences with the Marillac Fellows program. Thus, we will present the data from Phase 3 (Focus Group) first, in order to highlight the difference in experiences. Then, we present data from Phase 2 (Individual Interviews) and Phase 1 (Surveys). In order to retrieve the most information, we have also run success metrics (GPA, credit hours attempted versus earned) for all 19 students who signed up for the 2014 – 2015 Marillac Fellows Program for further context. After presenting the data, we will transition into the implications and discuss the ways that we might ensure each cohort has a similar experience, which addresses our chosen learning outcome.

Data Collection Phase 3

Part A: Fostering Successful Transitions through Academic Growth (curricular / cocurricular)

I. Identifying academic resources for academic success:

- a. 100% of focus group participants self-reported that their ability to identify campus resources for academic success ranged from Good to Very Good.
- II. Academic support services used in the 2014 – 2015 academic year by Marillac Fellows (2013 – 2014) cohort

TRIO Programs
Career Center
Library
Women Empowered*
Student Leadership Institute
Study Jams Initiative*

*indicates an OMSS initiative

- III. Identifying academic barriers
- a. 100% of participants self-reported that their ability to identify academic barriers was Very Good

IV. Barriers faced during the 2014 – 2015 academic year:

Financial assistance barriers
Scheduling as a commuter student:
- late hours on campus
- early hours arriving to campus
- less motivated to come to campus when classes are not in session
- less time for community building at DePaul University

Work schedule conflicts

The majority of participants in the focus group pointed to their status as a commuter student to also include issues with scheduling and balancing work, classes, and extracurricular activities. This is consistent with the primary reason that OMSS launched an initiative for commuter students with low academic ranking.

Part B: Fostering Successful Transitions through Personal / Peer Growth

- I. All student participants indicated that they were confident – extremely confident in connecting with their peers from the Marillac program for academic and social support.
- II. Most participants indicated that their ability to identify out of classroom activities that contribute to their success at DePaul was Fair to Very Good, given the barriers.
- “*I'd like to get more active...*”
 - “*I'd say fair to good because I work on campus...*”
 - “*I work three jobs... it's hard to find things with work...*”

However, when asked about the specific co-curricular activities they have engaged in their second year, they had a wealth of experiences and involvement, including:

Chicago Quarter Mentor (2)

STARS Mentor (2)

Off campus Internships

Sorority

Participation in a volunteer group

Lectures hosted by their academic department

Study abroad

III. Second year students indicated that the Marillac Fellows were still their primary source of support, even in their second year.

- “*Sometimes it can be hard to make friends in class...*”
- “*Since we were a cohort, we were able to have space together...*”
- “*We took class together for 3 quarters, so we were forced to get close...*”
- “*I feel that the other group (2014 – 2015 Marillac cohort) is not as close as we are / were...*”
- “*We wanted to take classes together. Having time together and a support system was crucial for me*”
- “*I wish it would go on throughout (my time at DePaul)... at least one class together per quarter*”
- “*These are the people I can hit up for personal issues. We support each other academically... it would have been sucky if not...*”
- “*We’re so close. We tried to maintain the cohort model even when we were out of Marillac Fellows*”

IV. Other sources of support for transition & personal growth included:

- STARS peer mentor*
- Friends & family
- Mazza cohort*
- Sorority members

*indicates an OMSS initiative

Data Collection Phase 2 (Individual Interviews & Related Documents, Marillac Fellows 2014 – 2015 Cohort):

Part A: Fostering Successful Transitions through Academic Growth

I. Identifying academic resources for academic success:

- a. “*The campus resources that greatly contributed to my academic success so far this academic year are the tutoring center, the Writing Center, the Library, and access to online academic resources students would normally have to pay for themselves (i.e. Lynda, software, Ishare). I was made aware of these resources through my Explore Chicago class, my mentor, classmates, posters, and advisors*”.

- b. “*My STARS Peer Mentor helped me a lot, she told me about the book loan and to go to Study Jams. I get to study with my friends which is helpful.*”

- II.** Identifying academic barriers
- a. None discussed (1 student)
 - b. “*I commute and so that makes things hard sometimes because it takes away a lot of my time and I just can't be on campus a lot.*”

Fostering Successful Transitions through Personal / Peer Growth

- I.** Connecting with peers for personal growth / peer growth
- a. “*I believe I have only faced one engagement barrier this year, which was trying to join clubs that fit within my schedule, and are not too late at night... After discussing this issue with my mentor & advisors, the best solution seems to be to write individual articles that can be submitted to the DePaulia as my schedule allows*”
 - b. “*I have connected with most of my peers and support networks through the Marillac Fellows and STARS, since I have classes with majority of the participants of these programs. Since I see them at events, and in class, we eventually become comfortable with one another, and build relationships easily*”.
 - c. “*I have become very close with a lot of people from the group. Some of it was because we didn't really like the professor in the fall, so we would all get together to talk about that. But they have been the closest friends I have made; especially since I commute.*”
- II.** Data collection in Phase 1 & 2 came from the 2014 – 2015 cohort, who seemed to be less engaged in the program due to logistics / scheduling issues. Thus, we asked an additional question to this group: “What would it take to increase your engagement in the Marillac Fellows program”. Results include:
- a. “*I actually believe it would be very beneficial, in terms of increasing my participation in the Marillac Fellows program, for there to be more activities for the participants, so we can make connections with one another more often, and even build networks*”.
 - b. “*I wanted to do more stuff with each other as a group not in class, but it would be hard for me to stay around since I have to travel far to get home and my parents don't really like me being out too late.*”

Data Collection Phase 1 (Surveys, Marillac Fellows 2014 – 2015 Cohort):

Part A: Fostering Successful Transitions through Academic Growth

- I.** Identifying academic resources for academic success:
- a. The writing center
 - b. Career Center, Writing Center, OMSS office
 - c. UMIN, SLI, OMSS
 - d. Library

- e. Study Jams and Library Research Center
 - f. STARS, Marillac Fellows
 - g. Book loans
- II.** Identifying academic barriers
- a. Time management
 - b. time management, priorities
 - c. LSP 120 class
 - d. Commuting
 - e. Studying

Complete the table below using your primary learning outcome. This information will be reported to the Office for Teaching, Learning and Assessment to demonstrate achievement toward university learning outcomes. Report each number as a whole number, not as a percentage, range or decimal.

Learning Outcome	Number of Students Assessed	Number of Students with Acceptable or Better Performance
Knowledge Acquisition, Application, & Integration Students who participate in Student Affairs programs and activities will be able to integrate and apply knowledge gained across curricular and co-curricular experiences in order to advance academic, personal, and career growth.	5 Focus Group 2 Surveys Collected Fall 5 Surveys Collected Winter 2 Individual Interviews 19 students assessed for success metrics Total: 31	Nine of twelve participants have ended the academic year with a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or better. The average cumulative GPA: 2.811. Average credit hours for the cohort during the academic year was 26.75 with no student hitting the recommended earned 48 credit hours for the year.

VI. Discussion & Interpretation of Results

Challenges & Limitations

As stated above, this year's cohort was faced with many class scheduling conflicts which resulted in a lack of deep participation with the program. This was evidenced when students chose to take classes outside of their cohort, in order to fulfill their academic requirements, low attendance during extracurricular outings such as plays, productions, etc. Thus, one of our biggest challenges during this assessment project was our sample size. We were able to get some robust information due to collecting a variety of data – including surveys, individual interviews, and a focus group from last year's cohort – in order to help tell the story of the Marillac Fellows program

from year to year. However, our sample size is still relatively small and is not a representation of all students who fall within this demographic.

Key Findings

- *Qualitative Data Themes: Three primary themes emerged from our data*
 - *The differences in cohorts:*
 - There is a stark difference between the data in Phase 3 and Phases 2 & 1, as the Phase 3 participants had a full year of taking academic classes together without interruption. Thus, they described feeling closer to each other, being able to support each other academically and socially, as well as commenting on the differences they perceived from their cohort to this year's cohort. They also described finding ways to carry on the cohort model into their second year by staying in touch and taking courses together, as their schedule / major allows them to.
 - *The desire for more personal growth / peer networking programs:*
 - The academic cohort of 2014 – 2015 indicated that they would like more programs that they can use to network with their peers in the Marillac Fellows program, whereas, it seemed that the 2013 – 2014 cohort was able to achieve a stronger peer network. Staff in OMSS will have to think creatively about the ways that we can do this that will still garner a reasonable amount of participation and examine the differences between the programming from 2013 – 2014 cohort & the 2014 – 2015 cohort.
- *Qualitative and Quantitative Themes:*
 - *The ability to discuss barriers as a commuter student*
 - In all three phases of data collection, survey results, and focus group, students described and / or alluded to the difficulties of transitioning into their first year as commuter students. Survey results gave us this information in brief, while the individual interviews and focus group really helped us to expound upon the nuances of the issue. Commuting includes traveling, scheduling classes during reasonable hours for the student, and working. Balancing this schedule requires important time management skills (which were alluded to in both the qualitative and quantitative findings).
 - *The ability to engage with OMSS programs across the board for their student success*
 - In all three phases of data collection, we noticed a trend of students taking advantage of many of the College Transitions programs in OMSS, including STARS peer mentoring (i.e. *“I have connected with most of my peers and support networks through the Marillac Fellows and STARS, since I have classes with majority of the participants of these*

programs) and the Study Jams program which is a tutoring / academic success initiative through OMSS. It seems that introducing students to the Marillac Fellows program also allows them to access and see their peers taking advantage of the other programs available through OMSS, which they have listed in the data above.

- *Quantitative Data Findings:*

- Participants in the Marillac Fellows programs were able to speak to some of DePaul University's resources for academic success and support.
- Participants were also able to name a few barriers to their academic success at DePaul University.
- Nine of twelve participants in this academic year's cohort have ended the academic year with a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or better.
- The average cumulative GPA: 2.811. Average credit hours for the cohort during the academic year was 26.75 with no student hitting the

These results were consistent with the prior research done in regards to students from this particular demographic, as well as with Tinto's (1998) work on retention. However, this project did allow us to clarify exactly what about the commuter student's experience caused conflicts to their academic success. In addition, it clarified that academic success was mostly achieved through the cohort model. However, through this project we learned that if our students do not have consistent scheduling of classes together in addition to social events, the participation dwindles. This may shed light on why this year's cohort did not hit the success metrics for recommended credit hours earned.

VII. Recommendations and Plans for Action

Results from this project will be primarily shared through our reporting structure and annual reporting process. Overall, this project is important, as Goal 1 of Vision 2018 states that success & transition initiatives are primary. This assessment project and data outlines that OMSS will need to focus on the second part of that goal: innovation. OMSS is still committed to this group of students. This will become increasingly important as we do not have the support of academic affairs to continue a cohort based academic schedule going into the 2015-16 academic year. This means that we will need to be more innovative when we think about the ways in which we are serving these students.

This assessment project also implies that students are taking advantage of our Study Jams & STARS peer mentor transition programs. So, we are currently in the process of discussing the ways that we can assist this demographic more intentionally within our STARS peer mentoring programming. We have a number of STARS peer mentors that have participated in the Marillac Fellows program. So we are considering facilitating further conversation on folding Marillac Fellows learning outcomes into existing programs and / or peer mentorship outcomes. Our timeline for this is aligned with the start of the academic year in August 2015.